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Parton, Glenn

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## Rudolf Bahro's Invisible Church

Glenn Parton

Weaverville  
California

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*The few recognize one another and are one.*  
Holderlin

Our social and ecological crisis demands a political solution. Time and again the best people have come together and attempted it, but the megamachine rolls on. What is the reason for this? The facts are everywhere, and some people already know that the load we have placed on the planet is unsupportable (and eco-systems are collapsing everywhere). It is unclear how many "awake" people there are, but there are enough of us so that if we came together and worked together as One, then we could build a large-scale movement for deep change. This is not happening. Instead, various social-change groups often gain momentum, then stagnate, weaken and disintegrate, or they are unable to make a beginning at all.

Could it be that we need to cultivate spiritual readiness for successful politics? We have failed to transform the world not because material circumstance are not ripe for it, and not because too many people are ignorant or indifferent about the need for it, but because aware individuals cannot get along well enough with one another to do the things that must be done. Getting along with one another is not just a matter of agreement about values, but about communicating with one another as complete human beings.

Toward this end, Maik Hosang has begun the *International Integral Association*,<sup>[i]</sup> which is a free, friendly, and joyful conversation among integral individuals--among individuals with self-knowledge that integrates body, mind, and spirit<sup>[ii]</sup>-- for deep communication with one another. The novel idea of *IIA* is that the next step in evolution, required to solve the ecological crisis, is a free association of inwardly developed individuals who create a new structure of consciousness, a *We* consciousness-structure. The spirit of the new age is not in the I, but between I and You.<sup>[iii]</sup>

My mentor and finally friend, Herbert Marcuse, initiated me into the worldspace of I and You, a form of deep communication based on trust, involving dialogue and silence, respect, reciprocity and solidarity. (A great man is always more than the sum of his ideas.) When individuals truly meet, or encounter one another in the full sense, then a new intensity and quality of consciousness is born. It is this spirit of the "in between," a shared awareness of, and identification with the whole, which can provide the love, strength, and wisdom for the difficult task ahead.

Modern society is far from actualizing its potentialities for freedom, truth and joy. To know this is to have a level of consciousness that transcends "normal" or everyday awareness. This is not just a matter of rational knowledge, but of a higher awareness, an integral self-experience of what collective life on this planet *could* be, with love as the source and summit of our endeavors.

When a person with integral knowledge connects with another person with integral knowledge, then a new consciousness-reality arises. For example, more than twenty years ago I was walking with Marcuse, and we came to a busy intersection of automobiles, which he had to cross each day on his way from his philosophy-office to his house. Standing on the corner, waiting for the traffic to clear, I said: "Look at it, beautiful isn't it." He looked at me but said nothing. In that silence, there was communication between our deep inner places. That busy intersection was a microcosm of the Great Machine, but there was also, on that day, the intersection of our souls (for lack of a better word), a mutual, unspoken awareness of another world, a better age, more real than the given reality. When I know the truth, and You know the truth, and we spark one another, and cross over into one another, then this truth becomes a collective power that is the beginning of a new culture, a more beautiful world.

Contra-Sartre, heaven is other people, not as we in fact are, but as we could be. Whoever has tasted this reality cannot be satisfied with less from others. The "look" that Sartre argued reduces others to objects can also open the gates of heaven. We are the problem and the solution.

According to Ernst Bloch: "Jesus never said, 'The Kingdom of God is within you.' Literally, this portentous line reads, 'The Kingdom of God is among you' and it was said to the Pharisees, not to the disciples. It means, the Kingdom is living among you Pharisees now, in the chosen community of these disciples." [\[iv\]](#)

Everyone has an inner-place where we already know what we need to know in order to solve the eco-crisis, but not everyone is open to it, not everyone knows that they know it. This inner-place contains the intelligence of nature, which extends itself into us as the basis of behavior. When two or more people, who are in touch with this universal intelligence or spirit, touch one another, then evolution accelerates and leaps into a new mode of consciousness, a We structural identity.

If we think with our entire organism, instead of just with the (left-half) brain, then all of evolutionary experience is available to us. We feel the force in Nature reaching beyond modern individualism to establish a new form of collective life, in which the autonomous personal ego is preserved in a non-egocentric self-concept. A true integration of individualism and collectivism is an intimate union, a twofold experience at the same time, where and when I am aware of you and myself as unique personalities and also as vehicles of universal spirit. True individuality is accomplished in carrying out, together with others, the mission of world history.

New science is discovering that everything is energy, consciousness-force, and that every particle in the universe may be in instantaneous (faster than light) communication with every other particle. We need to pay attention to *all* that is

going on within us and between us, rather than focusing, primarily, on outer activities. We are constantly receiving and sending secret stimuli or silent messages that trigger our feelings and thoughts and set us in motion. By discerning these intimations and learning to cooperate and resonate--for that is how evolution works--we evolve Mind, not as an isolated individual, but a social phenomenon.

The greater truth and communication of our togetherness is always trying to be born in this world, but unfortunately we block it or limit it, so that many things that would be self-evident are clouded in controversy, disagreement, and conflict. We desperately need to access the universalistic pole of human existence, since we have a culture that absolutises the pole of individuality and separateness. Hitherto, an extraordinary individual here and there has proven that it is possible to put the good of the whole first, but a comprehensive strategy and solution for the crisis of civilization will only be worked out by a community of these enlightened individuals.

It is not enough to keep trying to organize and actualize a political agenda or political ideas, while not evolving interpersonal relationships out of silent agreement about the need for fundamental change (which puts ecology before economy and long-term matters before immediate and short-term ones). Our creative power resides in our capacity for identification and communication with one another. It is a potentiality that we, as a species, have hardly begun to develop. Evolution is calling us to the next task: *Know One Another*. This is the foundation of the future. If we continue to overlook and waste the enormous wealth of human relationships, then we have understood neither the end for which we are striving nor the means for achieving it; for deep friendship is both the means and end of evolution.

Modern society must be led out of the crisis. Who shall lead? Western political philosophy reached its apex with the work of Marx and Marcuse, who endorsed the idea of rule by an intellectual elite as the means to a free society. It was the genius of Rudolf Bahro in his book, *Avoiding Social And Ecological Disaster*[\[v\]](#) (which has unfortunately been virtually ignored in America and elsewhere), to have uncovered the spiritual roots of this idea. Bahro argued that Marx's concept of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" has its roots in the original concept and tradition of a "Communion of Saints." This idea of a free union of individuals who are inwardly and outwardly devoted to God (understood not as a personal father figure, but as the realization of truth, goodness and beauty on earth), whose task it is to lead others to God, reached a high point with Holderlin, Schelling, and Hegel.

At Tübingen seminary, these men came together under the concept of an *Invisible Church*, a non-hierarchical association open to everyone who is dedicated to the realization of Heaven on Earth. Holderlin, Schelling and Hegel believed that the ideals of the French Revolution could only be realized under

the collective leadership of individuals who had not only developed their mental or intellectual powers, but who had achieved a harmony of their whole being. Holderlin, perhaps exemplifies best, the integral human being that is needed today, someone with a fully developed heart, mind, and will for deep friendship as the way to a more beautiful world. Love bore the world, friendship will bear it again.<sup>[vi]</sup>

This spiritual-political idea, latent in Marx, of a community of integral individuals who could lead society out of the crisis was increasingly rationalized by the subsequent development of Marxist theory. (Incidentally, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century communism—during the period of Thomas Muntzer, for instance—was still spiritual.) It is part of our present dilemma that many intellectuals still think that reason alone can stop the apocalypse. IIA returns to the idea of an Invisible Church or an Invisible Community, rescuing the living aspect of spirit from its narrowing-down to a collection of disembodied, spiritually repressed, mental-egos or abstract talking heads. It is not a question of thinking less, but of holistic communication and holistic politics.

Modern society is a culture of isolation and loneliness. Along with material wealth, the poverty of human relationships is growing. Deep friendship, in the sense of individuals who help one another to reach the godhead, is becoming impossible to find and sustain. We are fleeing from one another. Aware people need to turn toward one another, mirror one another, and increase self-knowledge and other-knowledge. We must solve the problem of the shadow (those parts of the self that one does not like and rejects and projects onto others), which time and again prevents us from moving forward as a spiritual group with a political intention.

This means in-between work. Everyone has been seriously wounded by this competitive dysfunctional civilization, so it is impossible to get in to a higher state together without each person going through, at least once, a self-determined internal psychoanalysis, for which the *ötherí*, as friend in waiting, is indispensable. Considering the shame, guilt, and hatred that must come to the surface and be released, it is understandable why the simple and noble ideal of friendship is very hard to achieve. Working through and letting go of personal injury and resentment, amounting to an internal psychological revolution, although inconvenient and frustrating for spiritual grouping, allows Eros to overflow, which is the essence of the healing process that ultimately results in finding oneself in the *ötherí* and the *ötherí* in oneself.

The right strategy is neither the compulsive actionism of the West, nor the spiritual individualism of the East, but a Third way, which is the in-between, where we focus our time and energy on developing a free union of whole individuals. We cannot disregard politics, but rushing into the next plan of action, or striving to have direct influence on the power-apparatus, is not the most important thing at this historical juncture. We should assemble mainly

backstage, and let the political-spiritual readiness to alter the world in a fundamental way build-up. The hour of revolution will come, if we prepare the ground for it. This ground is deep intersubjectivity, out of which will emerge a new integral culture--economy, society, spirituality.

Some radicals think that there is no time for between work, that it is superficial and unnecessary, but not the political philosopher Herbert Marcuse, who argued that an *Anthropological Revolution* must precede the emergence of a free society. He argued that only a new kind of person, with a new consciousness, new desires and needs, only a total transformation of human nature, can bring about lasting qualitative social change. Although Marcuse rejected the terminology of spirituality, this idea recognizes the need for basing politics on subjective forces of consciousness and being not yet evolved.

In *Eros And Civilization* Marcuse (1955) showed that the energy for social action comes from the original tendency of life-energy itself, Eros, which strives for a joyful connection with others. He calls for a reorientation of our energies from efficiency and production to communion and community. There is a spiritual dimension in Marcuse's thought: an ontological sphere of free energy in the unconscious that is beneath and beyond the total control of the social psyche (one-dimensionality is not complete), which is the source of human renewal, of non-material needs of the heart and spirit. We must tap this reservoir of energy, which is the logic of love. It is accessible to us, but not by reason alone. The capacity for feeling must be fully developed, and we must know the Beauty of the wholeness of human life. Like Marx, Marcuse (as well as Horkheimer and Adorno) overemphasized the role of reason as the means to freedom and happiness, but this was not the final word.

In his last book, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Marcuse (1977) returned to the issue that occupied Kant (1790) in his *Critique Of Judgement*—namely, how to bridge the gap between theoretical reason and practical reason, science and ethics, truth and goodness? It turns out that the experience of the Beautiful entails a harmony of human faculties (sensibility, imagination, reason) that subjectively prepares us for political consciousness and action. Schiller's (1793) *Aesthetic Letters* had essentially made the same point: Beauty is the bridge from barbarous society to dignified Statehood. Kant's great insight that "Beauty is the symbol of morality" pointed to the political strategy and solution that we must intuit or feel the reality of freedom as Beauty before we can establish rational institutions.

As friends, Holderlin, Schelling and Hegel were convinced that "the highest act of Reason, the one through which it encompasses all Ideas, is an aesthetic act."<sup>[vii]</sup> This means that the Idea of Mankind can not be made real by the State, but must come about through an aesthetic philosophy that is the teacher of mankind. An aesthetic philosophy appeals both to reason and to the senses. What is needed is a "new religion of the senses" or a "philosophy of the spirit": an open community of strong individuals, integrating love and reason, and

dedicated to the realization of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Then a new church or new age will rise out of the dead society, which means a lot more than academic papers, seminars, and workshops.

Religion is love of Beauty. (Holderlin) Eros, the source of beauty, strives to make one out of many; it works not only horizontally by creating a web of life, but also vertically by creating levels of more complex and sophisticated reality. Eros unites and ascends. Each level of reality has its own beauty. The highest and most beautiful reality is the harmony of free beings, or deep friendship. It is only when we recognize one another as One and experience the *living beauty of deep friendship* that the spirit of a new politics, which could rescue all of life on earth, becomes visible. In other words, the aesthetic experience of the harmony of free beings prepares us for fruitful political discussion and action. It confers on us the capacity for adequate politics. Until this happens, Eros will remain frustrated in its aim to achieve a society of fully responsible political animals.

*IIA* is an association of spirits. It exists wherever two or more are gathered in its name. Let us come together on local, regional and global levels, and create this radiating spiritual-moral authority. Eventually, as a full-scale social movement, *IIA* will create out of itself the institutions of a new political order, which could be a system of tribal councils built one upon the other in a hierarchical arrangement from the locality to the world level. Perhaps humanity, as Bahro recommended, will organize itself into second-order tribes, or families by choice, and be, as a whole, like a single tribe, with an Ecological Council at the top which functions as a world government.

This ecological council would recapture the original meaning of tribal councils that existed in older societies, which represented the whole of nature (water, air, plants, animals), but now on the basis of a different awareness—namely, an integral awareness that includes and transcends all earlier stages of development (archaic, magic, mythic, mental). Until then (and nobody knows exactly what a future free society will be like), *We* will remain a minoritarian consciousness movement that governs by the example we set of leadership, not as a command function, but as communication and cooperation among the creative particles of society.

Only political friendship will provide the leadership that avoids global disaster. Why not come together openly now and form a new social body bound together by freedom and love and a commitment to fundamental and general interests, around which a movement can grow and organize? We must make holding-together concrete by meeting regularly (where and when this is possible), perhaps on the Sabbath, and start life-conversations that loop through one another and span the whole earth. The need for such associations is widespread. There is great hunger in the modern world for enjoyable circles of political friendship.



A new politics that removes the split between Logos and Bios, which is the root cause of the ecological crisis, will be born out of those who do not fear to look into one another, and trust in the realities and needs of human nature. Novalis, demanding a new/old church (1799), asked: "Where is that heavenly trust of human beings towards each other..?"<sup>[viii]</sup> With the contact of I and You, we are accessing our natural capacity for a higher structure of consciousness enfolded within us. Whoever takes a fatalistic, cynical, or skeptical attitude to this utopian idea from the start does not believe in the possibility of an anthropological revolution.

*Mystical Democracy*, which overcomes the dualism between leaders and followers, is the ultimate goal. As formulated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the monk, Joachim di Fiore, it is a future historical period in which the Holy Spirit is poured equally over all. When everyone is directly in touch with spirit, there is no longer any need to struggle for consensus about the general good--we already have it (faster than light). *IIA* works toward this goal of an unmediated democracy, which the World Wide Web has made technologically feasible, through a more and more intensive consensus among its participants. It is a long way! considering how pure we must be in order for an assembly of the people not to be thrown out of balance by egocentric individualism.

The temptation to jump into traditional (irradical) politics is great, especially since we are speeding toward world-destruction. However, is it necessary that we survive at all costs? Evolution will continue without humans. The most important thing is the quality of unfolding Life on earth. There is no shortcut and the risk must be taken. The new consciousness must first of all get itself together. Only patience, a spirit of reconciliation, and a slowly developing politics of love will ripen into a new political identity and program for us all.

Voting, letter writing, and politicking are compatible with taking the long run up. However, the freedoms of liberal democracy cannot stop the crisis because they are captive to powerful special interests that prevent anything really important from coming forth for discussion and decision. Carrying on with conventional politics belongs to the politics of emergency, whose purpose it is to gain time to build something new, an association of like-minded and like-feeling people everywhere, which would eventually bring deep change.

Nor will the politics of confrontation and protest bring a turnaround. The warrior-mentality is itself part of the problem in that all too often we start off fighting "them," and end up fighting everyone, including each other. The "fighting spirit" is part of human nature and it has a positive role to play (as was intended in the original idea of the Communist Party as a "fighting union of the like-minded"). However, our primary political *focus* should be on developing the emotional bonds of friendship among aware people (instead of uniting ourselves on the basis of an outside enemy), so that a new culture rises up within us. Moreover, the concept of an "enemy" is inappropriate in the present social



situation because the dividing lines run not so much between people as within people. There is light and dark in each person. Only if we come together as points of light is there an opportunity to illuminate a new social community, a city set on a hill, for everyone to see.

International Integral Association  
C/o Glenn Parton  
P.O. Box 1997  
Weaverville,  
Ca. 96093 USA

[Rain51@hotmail.com](mailto:Rain51@hotmail.com)

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[i] Maik Hosang, *Integral Forum 3000*. Can be read online at <http://rocky.unca.edu/~combs/IntegralAge/IntegralForum3000.htm>

[ii] Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 1939.

[iii] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 1937.

[iv] Ernst Bloch, *Man On His Own*, see chapter entitled, "Christian Social Utopias."

[v] Rudolf Bahro, *Avoiding Social And Ecological Disaster*, Gateway Books, 1994. (Translated from the German by David Clarke.)

[vi] Friedrich Holderlin, *Hyperion*, 1798. (Translated from the German by Willard Trask).

[vii] See *Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism*, 1796.

[viii] Novalis, *Christianity or Europe*.

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